

OptixEQ Handicapping Series: Assessing The Favorite

An OptixEQ Approach to Assessing the Favorite

“Assessing the Favorite” is the first entry in the *OptixEQ Handicapping Series*—a collection of articles that will help you optimize your OptixEQ experience in the most powerful way possible. We chose this topic first because we think it’s the most important aspect of handicapping for anyone who wants to be a successful long-term player. In order to consistently make money and maximize your profits, you need to know when to take a stand against the favorite. Just to review: favorites win 35% of the time and finish in the exacta 55% of the time and in the trifecta 69% of the time, according to a study conducted by AGameofSkill.com.

Our approach is to scan our OptixEQ products, looking for certain things that might point out the vulnerability of today’s favorites. We review OptixNOTES, OptixPLOT, and OptixGRID, trying to answer two simple questions:

1. **Is the favorite fast enough to win today’s race in his current form?**
2. **Is today’s pace and race-shape favorable?**

We understand that there are more than just two ways to assess the betting favorite, but this straightforward approach is meant to help streamline the process by applying some specific OptixEQ guidelines to the unique information that is available in our products. If you play multiple tracks or are involved in a contest, it might normally take you hours to go through every race, picking and choosing your spots. By using our OptixEQ platform, you can quickly assess every race more efficiently, allowing you to isolate your key plays by using this simple approach.

Keep in mind that this is just one way to start the handicapping process. The more you use OptixEQ, the more you’ll develop your own approach, finding patterns and race shapes that are strong plays for you—and that might even include using a strong favorite who could be the key to a multi-race or exotic wager. But for now, here is how we like to start looking at a race, trying to find vulnerable favorites.

Is the favorite fast enough to win today’s race in his current form?

First we determine an OptixFIG range for what it will take to win today’s race. Simply click on the OptixFIG column in our OptixGRID to sort the OptixFIGS in descending order. We also like to narrow down the figures by filtering for the last 180 days and for races on today’s surface and at today’s distance (by using SPR or RTE).

We then establish a range by taking the highest OptixFIG and subtracting 8 points from it for sprints and 6 points for routes. (NOTE: if the highest OptixFIG is more than 4 points faster than the second-highest figure in the race, we consider that an outlier and just use the second-highest figure instead to establish our benchmark.)

So, if the highest OptixFIG is 92, and the race is a sprint, then our OptixFIG range would be 84-92. You can use your own method to establish this range, but we have found this approach to be useful because it really helps eliminate horses who are currently too slow to compete. Note: this range works better with older horses. Younger, developing horses can improve dramatically, and we have found that in those instances, it’s important to rely more heavily on OptixNOTES performance grades and projections to give us an edge.

Once we have established an OptixFIG range, we then compare the favorite’s recent OptixFIGS to that range to determine if they are a fit. If the current numbers don’t stack up, and if there is no major form change expected (i.e., a drop in class, a change to a preferred surface, etc.) and/or there are no positive keywords or projections suggesting an improved performance, then the answer to this question is “no.”

However, if the horse's recent OptixFIGS are within the expected range, then we move on and review other form-cycle related patterns to assess the horse's current ability to compete in today's race. Some of the *negative* patterns we look for are:

- Declining OptixFIGS (typically three consecutive declining figs but could also be just a general downward trend).
- Negative keywords, which are marked in **red**, in most recent OptixNOTES assessments (note: two or more negative keywords are a strong indication of vulnerability).
- A **"C"** OptixNOTES performance grade in last effort, provided that grade was earned under similar circumstances (class, surface, distance, etc.).

Is today's pace and race-shape favorable?

After you've assessed the horse's form in OptixGRID, you should look at OptixPLOT and ask yourself: "Can the favorite win based on the race shape and his position on the PLOT?"

Look at the favorite's preferred run style (OptixRPM) and compare it to his PLOT position to determine if there are any possible discrepancies. Some obvious examples of bad pace match-ups are a small square or circle for a deep closer ("C") in Q4 in a race with a soft Contention and Speed Rate. Or an early-speed type ("E" or "E/P") in Q1 with a medium or large circle in a race that has a hot Contention rating (flame) and a high Speed Rate (above 50).

There are more nuanced interpretations that can be used as you get more familiar with OptixPLOT, but by checking the OptixRPM, along with viewing the Contention and Speed Rate, you should be able to get a good idea of the race shape and whether the favorite's run-style and PLOT position are suited to today's race. The more you do this, the more you'll know what to look for, and you will begin to get very good at identifying a favorite's vulnerability based on race-shape and pace dynamics.

Other Factors

If both the answers to the above questions are "no," then we can start considering secondary factors to strengthen our assessment of a potential bad favorite. You probably have your own list to consider, but here are the questions we like to ask. The answers to these questions will enable us to measure the strength of our conviction regarding the betting favorite.

- Is the favorite coming off a long layoff (more than 180 days) and now dropping in class?
- Is the favorite making a suspicious drop (two or more class levels off an in-the-money finish)?
- Is the favorite's current racing schedule spotty (i.e., is he having trouble stringing races together with two consecutive layoffs of 45 days or more)?
- Is the horse switching from a high- to a low-percentage trainer?

An OptixEQ Example of a Vulnerable/Bad Favorite



OptixGRID™

CD 2016-06-09 Race 3 \$21,000 Sprint of Dirt
Claiming(Claim 15000n2) 3 year olds and Up -

PlotFit ● Contention ●

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Previous Race Next Race

Select Race: 3

CD_16-06-09_03

Range : 80-88



* This Race Filter Help Keyword Dictionary Clear Filters Common Filters: Current Year Races in last 45 days Today SurfDist

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PN	HorseName	RaceDate	DLR	Track	Surf	Dist	Cond	RaceClass	Finish	oFIG	oNg	optixNOTES™	Projections	xC	oCg	PP	1C	2C	Str	Fin	FTime	Jockey	M-E	Trainer	Odds
5	Rest Assured	20160609	34	CD ³	D	SPR (8f) Fast	Clim 15000n2	5	10	65	C+	NO_KEEP				4	3 ²	3 ⁵	5 ⁸	5 ¹³	110.59	Lanerier		Kenneally	1.4
5	Rest Assured	20160506	22	CD ¹³	D	RTE (8f) Fast	Alw 40000s	10	1	77	B+	BOS				9	2 ²	3 ¹	10 ⁷	10 ¹⁷	136.73	Castellano		Kenneally	15.8
5	Rest Assured	20160414	20	KEE ²	D	SPR (8f) Fast	Md 20000	1	1	77	B+	BOS				7	2	1 ²	1 ³	1 ⁸	111.84	Castellano		Kenneally	1.2
5	Rest Assured	20160325		GP ⁷	⊗	RTE (8f) Sloppy	Md 50000	4	4	74	C+	WIDE				4	4 ²	3 ¹	4 ⁸	4 ¹²	138.75	Castellano		Kenneally	3.5

Standard



Surface / Distance

